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The National Association for the Promotion of Ecological Agriculture (ANAFAE) is a Honduran association of non-governmental organizations with more than 25 members whose goal is to strengthen the capacities of its members to contribute to sustainable rural development.



Managing conflict over natural resources in Honduras



Communities in the municipality of Balfate, in the Rio Bejucal region along Honduras' Caribbean coast, are frustrated with the conduct of a hydroelectric company constructing a nearby dam. The company has not delivered on promises to improve health, education and basic services in return for use of land and water resources. Adding insult to injury, the local people will not even have access to electricity from the power plant. This is just one example of conflict over natural resources facing many communities in Honduras.

Better management of such conflict is recognized as a critical development issue in Honduras. In early 2004, the Ministry of Natural Resources (SERNA), the National Association for the Promotion of Ecological Agriculture (ANAFEA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), German Cooperation Agency (GTZ), and IDRC jointly established a 'conflict management team' for training, dialogue, and exchange to identify and solve conflicts over natural resources. A needs assessment led to a proposal for creating an Alternative Conflict Management (ACM) program. Since 2005, IDRC has been supporting ANAFEA to develop a training and research network for ACM in Honduras.

The Alternative Conflict Management Project is strengthening the capacities of local organizations to gather and analyze data related to projects involving the use of natural resources. Over 640 people have been trained in ACM techniques. The network has been promoting conflict management based on multi-stakeholder approaches and has been supporting research to explore appropriate mechanisms for conflict transformation. Four case studies have been carried out on the north coast and two in Olancho.

Khamila O'Reilly, a local facilitator and board member of the Foundation of Pico Bonito National Park on the north coast, says "the project has helped us to analyze the problem and the situation of each stakeholder. Each actor can take a decision and put it on the table to be negotiated."

A network of local facilitators has been established on the north coast and another one is in the process of being established in Olancho. The networks have developed a strategic partnering plan to foster support from the community, governments, academia, civil society, the private sector and international organizations. Ultimately, stakeholders aim to use the network to develop a participatory long-term approach to sustainable management of natural resources.



In the case of the Balfate communities concerned about the Rio Bejucal, the local non-governmental organisation Popol Nah Tun and the municipality participated in capacity development through the project and collected extensive information on the dam. The community mobilized and established a Rio Bejucal Watershed Committee.



The project has succeeded in getting the hydroelectric company to join this Committee, whose main objective is to establish a long-term, integral vision for sustainable management of the watershed.

Another area under study is the Tocoa Watershed - threatened by expanding and unsustainable agricultural practices. The San Alonso Rodriguez Technical Foundation has encouraged the elaboration of a community-based territorial plan that will help protect and manage forested areas. By using ACM methods the stakeholders have identified acceptable areas for agriculture, forestry and conservation in five communities.

During the course of the project it became clear that community leaders and civil society need more training to apply alternative conflict management techniques in the local context. NGOs also need training and stronger capacity to carry out participatory research that can lead to concrete actions in the communities where they work.

Another key lesson is the importance of sharing power and responsibility in network governance. The ACM project has developed a multi-institutional governance model for its diverse alliance of NGOs, local universities, and international donor agencies. Although this complex mix can slow processes down, the arrangement has contributed to creative problem solving.

Exchanges with organizations involved in similar socio-environmental conflict transformation in Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru have deepened understanding of this alternative approach. Next steps involve consolidating regional networks and strengthening the facilitators' capacities to negotiate conflicts, and linking them with international networks. Dialogue needs to be encouraged among communities, government and private sector interests involved in major infrastructure, tourism, and renewable energy projects. The vision is not only to manage ongoing conflicts but also to prevent future conflicts by establishing a nation-wide system that brings all stakeholders to the table.